

The Open Mike^{District 2}

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 2, Number 4

May 2006

A Moment at the Mike

Too Much Information!



Councilmember Knapp

With the arrival of May, the Council is officially knee deep in the budget. The County Council will be meeting in all-day sessions every weekday for the next two weeks, holding countless council sessions, committee meetings, and public hearings. Information on the council's schedule changes almost by the minute, and it can be a whirlwind to follow, but check out the County Council Public Hearings Calendar, down below, to see if there's anything you want to talk about during a public hearing. If so, I hope to see you there.

This installment of The Open Mike is a lengthy one -- that's getting to be a habit -- but, I think, full of information that's bound to be of some interest to you. Whether you're looking for information on transportation, after school programs, historic preservation, park and planning, master plans, development districts, or whether you're just wondering if we're ever going to get that traffic light over by the Damascus Community Recreation Center, there's something in here for you. But if there's anything you're not seeing in here that you think you should, by all means, e-mail me and let me know; it's yet

another way I can make sure I'm doing the job you expect me to do.

Enjoy the Spring! Hike or bike one of our countless trails, spend an afternoon in one of our parks, or just enjoy the view in the Agricultural Reserve. And as always, feel free to contact me at (240) 777-7955, or at Councilmember.Knapp@montgomerycountymd.gov if I can be of any assistance to you. It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,

Mike Knapp
Councilmember, District 2

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Council Extends Deadline For Applications For Park and Planning Board Chairman

The County Council has extended to May 31 the deadline for applications for the position of Chairman of the [Montgomery County Planning Board](#). The tenure of the current Chairman expires on June 14, 2006. The Council will accept letters of application until 5:00 PM on May 31.

The Planning Board serves as the Council's principal adviser on land use planning and community planning. Planning Board members also serve as Commissioners of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Some of the Board's responsibilities with regard to planning are preparation and amendment of the County General Plan; preparation and amendment of the Master Plans and functional plans; and preparation of or recommendations on Text Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.

The Planning Board also sits as the Park Commission and approves the annual operating budget and Capital Improvements Program for the County park system, land acquisition contracts and major development contracts for parks, development plans for individual park facilities, policies for park operations, and park user fees. These functions require a meeting at least once each month.

The Chairman's responsibilities include performing a leadership role with respect to the Montgomery County portion of the Commission, as well as chairing the meetings of the Planning Board, and assisting in developing overall vision and direction for the Commission.

Letters expressing interest in being considered for the position, including a resume, should be addressed to Council President George L. Leventhal and must be received in the Council Office, Stella B. Werner Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20850, no later than 5:00 P.M. on Monday, May 31, 2006. It is the Council's policy not to consider applications received after the deadline. After the May 31 closing date, Councilmembers will review the letters of application and select applicants for interviews to be held in June or July.

For a job description, and to find out how to submit a letter of application, visit:

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/Council/PressRelease/PR_details.asp?ItemID=1767

Breaking News:

Current Planning Board Chairman Will Not Seek Reappointment

On May 2, the County Council was notified by Planning Board Chairman Derick Berlage that he would not seek reappointment to the Montgomery County Planning Board. I appreciate and commend Chairman Berlage for his two decades of public service.

This announcement makes our search for a new Planning Board Chairman even more critical. I encourage any qualified and interested individuals to apply.

Knapp Pushes for SHARP Program at Watkins Mill

Last October, I hosted a community forum in Watkins Mill -- with the help of the [Montgomery Village Foundation](#), [Montgomery County Police](#), and the [Watkins Mill Cluster Schools](#) -- where we had a lengthy discussion about gang violence and prevention. Since that time, we've been working together to identify possible solutions, both at the local and the county level, to help provide after-school activities, curb gang-related functions, and generally help improve things in the community. One cog that was identified as a necessary part of the larger community-based machine was the creation of a SHARP program in the area. For that reason, **I have submitted a request to the County Council to secure the funds needed to establish a new SHARP program in the Watkins Mill community.**

The SHARP program is a grassroots, community-school partnership that offers support to suspended students through trained volunteers and mentors. Since 1999, the goals of the program have been to provide a safe, supervised place where students can volunteer to serve out their suspensions, and where they can receive assistance in the completion of assignments, learn to take responsibility for their actions, and receive appropriate referrals to other services. There are presently six SHARP sites in Montgomery County -- in Bethesda, Burtonsville, Gaithersburg, Germantown, Olney and Silver Spring.

I have also asked for an increase of \$100,000 for the SHARP program countywide.

While the Upcounty SHARP program at Germantown currently serves Seneca Valley High School, Northwest High School, and Watkins Mill High School, this location is generally inconvenient or inaccessible for many students and their families in Watkins Mill. Having a site closer to Watkins Mill would also allow services at its feeder schools, Neelsville and Montgomery Village. All three schools have suspension rates at or above the county averages for middle and high schools.

I have requested \$55,000 to establish a SHARP program in Watkins Mill. And with the active leadership of the community, perhaps the most significant, and difficult task -- finding a safe and appropriate location -- has been taken care of, as the [Christ the Servant Lutheran Church](#) in Montgomery Village has generously offered to house the program.

As part of my overall request, I have also asked for an increase of \$100,000 for the SHARP program countywide. I'm pleased to report that at our April 19 meeting, the Education Committee agreed to include my request in the budget reconciliation bill that will be considered by the full Council.

Let me reiterate that neither I nor the residents of Watkins Mill view the establishment of a SHARP program as the only solution to the problems facing youth in their community. This is merely one piece of a larger, more comprehensive approach that is currently underway in the Watkins Mill area to address the ongoing needs of their community. I'm pleased to lend a hand.

Damascus Bypass Debated in Community, Council

At its April 4 worksession, the County Council took a straw vote on the Damascus Master Plan. With our vote, my colleagues and I upheld the vision and principles of the planning report's mixed-use town center concept. Out of concern for the environmental constraints that currently exist in the area, we also chose to limit density in the transitional development areas. Because Damascus is surrounded by the Agricultural Reserve, it's important to me -- and, I think, to Damascus residents -- that the town retains its compact character. That's why we provided zoning incentives for sensible, small scale, mixed-use development within the town center itself.



The Druid Theater in Damascus, now the Rite Aid Pharmacy.

The one remaining issue involves the so-called "Damascus Bypass." Should we establish the right-of-way for the route now, and then conduct a study at some undetermined point in the future on the necessity of a bypass from the MD 27 to send traffic around the Damascus community? The question at the moment is not whether a bypass should be built, but rather if an option should be preserved for a future bypass route. This has been and continues to be a challenging issue for the Damascus community.

If the Council indicates that the Damascus Master Plan should include a provision to establish the right-of-way for a bypass, then the next step would be for us to submit a request to the Maryland State Highway Administration for a multi-jurisdictional needs study, which would be carried out over the next two or three years. Such a study would look at traffic patterns and bypass options, including the use of roads in adjacent counties. Even if that study were to recommend a bypass - whatever route that might be -- no bypass would actually be constructed for another 15 to 20 years.

At the urging of the Council, Park and Planning held a hearing at the Damascus library to give residents an opportunity to provide additional input on the bypass. The Council's Planning, Housing & Economic Development Committee (PHED) will again take this issue up at its May 5 work session. The bypass right-of-way question will then go to the full Council on May 22.

Clarksburg Development District, Citizens Committee Discussed

The **Clarksburg Town Center Plan of Compliance** was presented to the Planning Board by Clarksburg advocates and developers on April 6, and to the Clarksburg community on April 20. I'm pleased the community was able to provide some feedback on the plan to the Planning Board at that time. While the Planning Board has not yet indicated its next steps or further scheduled actions, information will be posted here in *The Open Mike* as it becomes available. And for a look at the slideshow that was given during the presentation, [click here](#).

An **April 5 Clarksburg Town Hall meeting** gave area residents and county representatives the opportunity to meet Jennifer Russel, the County's new Ombudsman for Clarksburg. Ms. Russel can be reached at jennifer.russel@montgomerycountymd.gov, or by calling (240) 777-2584.

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Clarksburg (continued from page 4)

The Town Hall meeting also gave residents the opportunity to have a conversation about the Clarksburg Development Districts and the Clarksburg Development District Advisory Committee - which, for the uninitiated, necessitates a quick discussion about what, exactly, a development district is. In a nutshell, properties in development districts are levied special taxes and assessments are used to pay the debt service on bonds that finance specific infrastructure requirements. The ultimate goal of a development district is to expedite infrastructure improvements to better coincide with residents moving into newly-developed areas. **If that's as clear as mud, and you still need more information on exactly what a development district is and what it's for, click here.**



At the meeting, Ms. Russel discussed the Clarksburg Development District Advisory Committee, which has been created to seek community input and recommendations on how to move forward with pending development districts in the Clarksburg area. Membership on the Advisory Committee will include geographic representation by residents of the Clarksburg Town Center, Clarksburg Village, and Skylark Village. The committee will be asked to review the parameters of the development districts and to make recommendations to the County Council by December 1. **Residents interested in serving on the Advisory Committee should e-mail Jennifer Russel at the above e-mail.**

In the meantime, the Executive Branch has recommended putting on hold all development district decisions, pending recommendations from the Advisory Committee. To better understand the rationale behind this decision, the Council's Management and Fiscal Policy Committee held a formal discussion session with the Executive Branch on April 9. Discussions are continuing, and I hope you'll [let me know](#) of any comments or concerns you may have about the county's decision to put these development districts on hold.

General Assembly Guts Transit Funding Bill, Approves Study

Regular readers of *The Open Mike* know how I feel about the need to invest in our mass transit system and our transportation infrastructure. These issues are critical to me not only because they're vital to those of us who live and work in the Upcounty region, but also because I serve as Chairman of the [Transportation Planning Board for the National Capital Region](#) -- and in that capacity, one of my overarching goals is to ensure our entire region finds new ways to provide funding for mass transit.

I've been following several mass transit- and transportation-related bills as they made their way through the [Maryland General Assembly](#), and I've testified in Annapolis several times to see if I could help our Delegates and Senators move these bills along. Unfortunately, two of the bills I've



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Transit *(continued from page 5)*

been tracking, [HB 981](#) and [HB 1392](#) -- both of which would provide funding for mass transit through tax revenue -- were "unfavorably reported" by the House Ways and Means Committee, while [HB 1312](#), the Driver Responsibility and First Responders Act, died in committee when the General Assembly adjourned on April 11.

However, two other bills -- Delegate Hixson's bill [HB 1345](#) and Senator Kramer's companion bill [SB 850](#) -- have been approved by the General Assembly and are presently awaiting the Governor's signature. As introduced, these bills would have created a new mass transit line item within the existing State Transportation Fund. However, both bills were modified in committee to instead require the Maryland Department of Transportation to undertake a comprehensive study of the 20-year estimates for operating and capital costs for transit. The study is to look at funding systems in similar state and local jurisdictions and develop new funding strategies necessary to leverage federal funding. This report is due to be submitted to the General Assembly by December 15, 2006.

While the modified bills that passed are a start -- the State appears to finally acknowledge the very serious mass transit and transportation infrastructure problems we have -- a study isn't the same as the dedicated funding that [Delegate Hixson](#), [Senator Kramer](#) or I had originally hoped for. If Maryland hopes to work with the District and Virginia to leverage federal funding for Metro ([see the story below](#)), it needs to do more than simply issue another report. It is my hope that our state will take a proactive approach to transportation funding sooner rather than later. Like you, I'll look forward to reading the final report when it's issued in December -- and I'll expect our leaders in Annapolis to actively work to address this serious issue during the next session.

And while we're on the subject....

**DC Mayor Signs Legislation for Dedicated Metro Funding;
Davis \$1.5B Metro Bill Advances in U.S. Congress**

On April 27, I was pleased to stand with [Washington, DC, Mayor Anthony A. Williams](#) as he signed into law legislation to provide the [Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority \(WMATA\)](#) with a dedicated source of tax revenue, to the tune of some \$50 million annually. This measure brings the metropolitan Washington region one step closer to qualifying for \$1.5 billion in matching federal funds for its transit system.

While the District has made this commitment, Metro will still not be able to access these funds unless two things happen. First, Congress must approve H.R. 3496, authored by [Representative Tom Davis of Virginia](#), which will make the \$1.5 billion in federal funding available. Next, both Maryland and Virginia must also agree to provide an increased or dedicated portion of revenue to the Metro system. While the Hixson-Kramer legislation ([see the story above](#)) does not provide funding for Metro, it is nonetheless a step toward ensuring Maryland can and will provide dedicated funding for Metro.

To that end, Rep. Davis' bill, [H.R. 3496](#), was reported out of the [U.S. House Committee on Government Reform](#) on April 26, and has been placed on the House Union Calendar for consideration by the full House of Representatives. You can see a copy of the Government Reform Committee's report, H. Rept. 109-440, by clicking [here](#), and the reported version of the bill by clicking [here](#).

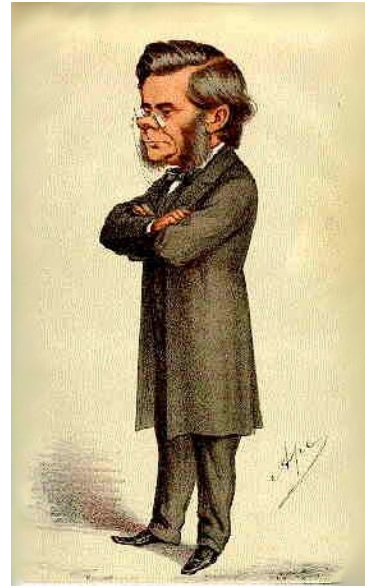
The Upcounty Road Scholar

Traffic Signal in the Works for MD 27 at Oak Drive in Damascus; "Exclusive Left Turn Phases" Set for Wisteria onto MD 118

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highways Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of *The Open Mike* provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community. And speaking of letting me know of projects in your community....



Got a question about roads, sidewalks, or construction in your area? [E-mail the Road Scholar](#) and let us know.

Maryland State Highways Administration Projects

Traffic signal for MD 27 at Oak Drive (Damascus): After numerous public meetings, countless public advocacy, and several requests from my office and others, I'm pleased to report that MSHA has agreed a traffic signal is warranted for the intersection of Oak Drive and MD 27, near the Damascus Community Recreational Center. "In a joint effort with DPWT," says MSHA District Engineer Darrell B. Mobley, "we are working on geometric improvements and traffic controls to provide safe egress at MD 27 and Oak Drive. You will be pleased to know that we are moving forward with the installation of a traffic signal at this location. It is our intent to have the signal installed within the next year, scheduling and weather permitting."

Left Turn Lanes from Wisteria onto MD 118 (Germantown): According to MSHA, "exclusive left-turn phases will be installed along both Wisteria Drive approaches to MD 118. While schedules for developer projects are primarily at the discretion of the developer, it is expected that these modifications will be completed by the end of the year."

While that's good news for drivers moving from Wisteria onto the MD 118, I'm still awaiting word back from MSHA on left turn signals for drivers making the turn off the MD 118 onto Wisteria. Keep watching The Road Scholar for the latest information as it becomes available.

DPWT Hotline: (240) 777-6000

All 23 County High Schools Make Newsweek's Top 1000 Schools List



For the second year in a row, Newsweek magazine has ranked five Montgomery County public high schools in the top 100 high schools in the nation. That's more schools in the top 100 than any other school district in America. In addition, **all 23 eligible high schools in Montgomery County are included in the top 3 percent in the country, according to the Newsweek list released on April 30.**

The five high schools in the top 100 are Richard Montgomery, Thomas Wootton, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Winston Churchill and Walter Johnson.

The Newsweek rankings highlight the efforts Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has made over the last six years to encourage more high school students from every background to take challenging

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. More MCPS high school students are taking and succeeding in AP and IB than ever before, and far outperforming the national average on the rigorous exams that accompany the courses.

Newsweek uses the "Challenge Index" which has been featured for the past several years in The Washington Post, as a way to measure the rigor of a high school academic program. The index is derived from the number of AP or IB tests taken by all students at a school divided by the number of graduating seniors.

The Newsweek rankings are the result of more than six years of steady efforts to reform the school system. The reforms are predicated upon hiring and training high quality teachers, reducing class sizes and offering students a rigorous and challenging curriculum. The reforms have focused on raising academic achievement for all students and closing the achievement gap.

Here's how Montgomery County's High Schools stacked up in the Newsweek Top 1000 List:

Rank	School	Rank	School
15	Richard Montgomery	426	Rockville
34	Bethesda-Chevy Chase	443	John F. Kennedy
51	Thomas Wootton	487	James Hubert Blake
74	Winston Churchill	507	Paint Branch
100	Walter Johnson	601	Watkins Mill
114	Walt Whitman	607	Wheaton
155	Springbrook	625	Damascus
230	Montgomery Blair	648	Albert Einstein
306	Poolesville	666	Gaithersburg
352	Col. Zadok Magruder	704	Northwest
362	Quince Orchard	772	Seneca Valley
367	Sherwood		

This information was excerpted from a Montgomery County Public Schools Press release, which may be viewed in its entirety by [clicking here](#). More information about the Newsweek Top 1000 is available at www.newsweek.com.

Goshen Historic Preservation Society Members Honored by DAR



On April 29, Joanne Atay of the Goshen Historic Preservation Society (GHPS) received the District of Columbia [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) (DAR) Chapter Community Service Award for her book *The Heart of Goshen, Maryland: Celebrating 300 Years of History*, as well as for her work in historic preservation, and for her research and writing in the field of mental health. Joanne will also receive the [Mary Washington DAR](#) Community Service Award for her book and for her service to the mental health field and community at a ceremony at the Potomac Community Center in Potomac, Maryland, on Saturday, May 20.

GHPS member Sharon Prather also has been nominated for a community service award by the Mary Washington Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, for her book *And We All*

Came Together: Prathertown Then and Now – A Collection of Memories, as well as for her lectures on the preservation and history of Prathertown. Next summer, Sharon will be studying religion and politics at Oxford University in England as part of the Regent University Program.

You can order a copy of Sharon Prather's book *And We All Came Together: Prathertown Then and Now – A Collection of Memories*, by clicking [here](#). Joanne Atay's *The Heart of Goshen, Maryland: Celebrating 300 Years of History* is available from Red Barn Antiques, 6860 Olney-Laytonsville Road in Gaithersburg, (301) 926-3053, or you may request a copy directly from Ms. Atay by clicking [here](#).

I know all residents share my pride in the accomplishments of these two outstanding residents. Their commitment not only to our county's historical spirit, but to the spirit of our county residents, personifies the very best in all of us.

Upcounty Capital Projects Funded by General Assembly

Before the Maryland General Assembly adjourned on April 11, it appropriated more than \$89 million for capital projects in Montgomery County, including quite a few projects important to the Upcounty. Here is a list of Upcounty projects that received funding from the Maryland General Assembly:

PROJECT	FUNDING RECEIVED
Montgomery College, Germantown Campus	\$1,700,000
Agricultural Activity Center	\$75,000
BlackRock Center for the Arts	\$50,000
Germantown Life Sciences Center	\$250,000
King Barn Dairy Mooseum	\$150,000
Montgomery Village Foundation	\$250,000

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Upcounty Projects (continued from page 9)

Olney Boys and Girls Club Community Park	\$400,000
Olney Theatre Center Campus	\$250,000
Our House Youth Home	\$425,000
Poolesville Town Hall	\$150,000
Sandy Spring Museum Library and Archives	\$200,000

Vox Pops

Voices From Around the Upcounty Community

A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny...but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.



Rethink Reforms to the Energy Tax

"With the current upward spiral of energy and electricity prices I hope you will champion a rollback in the county energy taxes. Those politicians who are working to lessen the rate of electricity increases throughout the state are somewhat hypocritical if they do not also make sure they are not piggybacking tax increases based on these rising costs. It would be too easy to allow the public to blame the electricity companies while governments are receiving the same increases in revenue. I'm sure most will target the companies and not see that these relatively small energy fees have also gone up. While I am strongly in favor of eliminating these taxes completely (and other fees/taxes on services, i.e. telecommunication) they should at least not grow based on spiraling electricity costs. These electricity increases already will be hurting some citizens of Montgomery County, the lower income residents of the county" -- *Robert*

Wanted: Trails With Rails

"The teenagers of Germantown and the surrounding area have a suggestion to make. During most afternoons a group of my friends and I like to bike, we BMX. There aren't many places in Germantown to bike at (as far as jumps and tracks and rails go). We have found several places to bike, some are out of the way but others are placed in the middle of neighborhoods. Frequently we have residents complaining to the police that we are disturbing the peace. We don't ever really disturb any one. We don't like having the police called on us and I'm sure its bothersome to them too. We think it could be beneficial to have a bike park built (with ramps and rails in it) for us to use." -- *Jeffrey, Alec and Others*

Approve the Damascus Bypass

"In my opinion, not reserving land for a potential future bypass for Damascus is just plain stupid. Usually planning involves the good sense to preserve options (especially when failures in earlier

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Vox Pops (continued from page 10)

planning processes have reduced the remaining options to two - one of those being moot due to the new recreation center). Including the possibility of a bypass around Damascus costs little and offers options later. Do any of the planners think that traffic through Damascus is going to decrease in the future? Do any Damascus residents want a four lane road going through the center of their town to service through commuters? One would think that the goal of thoughtful planning would be to serve the community...." -- Richard

Bring Back the Poolesville Beauty Spot

"I read recently in the paper that the effective July 1 that yard waste would no longer be accepted at the 'Beauty Spot' in Poolesville, and remember reading that one of the reasons was that it wasn't getting recycled and was mixed in with other trash. This is confusing to me - as we see the skid loaders maintaining separate piles - why would they not transfer the piles separately to the transfer station in Rockville? It seems backwards to make it difficult to recycle yard waste by forcing everyone to travel to Rockville to dump it - particularly in light of rising gas prices ... I would gladly pay a reasonable shared cost even for some type of county curbside pickup - that doesn't require bagging - which is impossible when have more than 1 acre of land. Preferably I'd like to see the county reverse their decision about yard waste at the beauty spot. If there is a problem with contractors dumping (I've heard this is an issue) 'as a resident' - then let's find a way to manage this without penalizing the residents who use the resource fairly. It seems to me we need to open more locally operated collection points - not close them - or limit them." -- Sarah

**Let me hear from you!**

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